

the greatest riesling on earth

RIESLING IS MAKING ITSELF AT HOME IN MORE AND MORE COUNTRIES, BUT WHERE IS IT PERFORMING BEST? **CLINTON CAWOOD** JOINS AN EAGER SOMMELIER PANEL FOR A TOP-NOTCH TASTING THAT PITS OLD WORLD AGAINST NEW WORLD AND SOME ACKNOWLEDGED MASTERS AGAINST HUNGRY, YOUNG UPSTARTS

The masses might still think that all Riesling is sweet and made in Germany (if indeed they think of it at all) but those in the restaurant trade know different. They know that Riesling is cool.

With its ability to mirror terroir and no oak influence, it gives the purest expression of site of any varietal. And, rather like Pinot Noir, its ability to 'go local' represents something of an ultimate challenge to winemakers, and one that they are rising to all over the globe.

This, for sure, isn't always a good thing. Sometimes Riesling has found itself in places where, with the best will in the world, it just doesn't belong – as out of place as a country lord of the manor at a rap battle.

This tasting, however, didn't deal with such things. Instead, we selected what we considered to be the best producers of dry Riesling across the globe and tasted them all in the interest of science. I know, I know, we're too good to you. Let's just say that we do it so you don't have to.

Are Germany and Alsace as good as they think they are? Can the New World 'do' complexity and elegance? And just where are New York State wineries based anyway?

All these questions and more were answered in the course of two hours of top quality Riesling action.

tasting panel

Irina Atanasova, Les Deux Salons **Paulo Brammer**, ETM Group **Andrea Bricarello**, Galvin La Chapelle **Luigi Buonanno**, Etrusca Restaurants **Clinton Cawood**, Imbibe **Nick Chiu**, Ashdown Park Hotel **James Hopkins**, The London Cocktail Club **Roger Jones**, The Harrow at Little Bedwyn **Senthil Kulandhaisamy**, Oxo Tower Restaurant **Nigel Lister**, Royal Thames Yacht Club **Roberto Loppi**, Hakkasan **Peter McCombie MW**, wine consultant **Gergely Szabo**, Le Bouchon Breton **Chris Zoeller**, Savoy Grill

RESULTS

CHILE

Average score: 76.2

81 Vina Leyda Neblina Vineyard 2008, San Antonio Valley

'Alpine in style – floral, with good acidity and ripe citrus fruit, quince, apple, minerality and nuttiness,' IA. 'Petrol and lemon notes on the nose. Very rich on the palate, with a mineral and citrus finish and great length,' RL.

£8.40, Great Western Wines, 01225 322 820

71 Casa Marin Miramar Vineyard Riesling 2009, San Antonio Valley

'Straightforward, zesty, fruity nose – minerality and acidity, with a hint of spritz. Firm but pretty,' PM. 'Floral, with a hint of honey on the nose. Dry and full-bodied on the palate,' RL.

£9.59, Hennings Wine Merchants, 01798 872 485

NEW ZEALAND

Average score: 73.6

77 Felton Road Dry Riesling 2008, Central Otago

'Delicate and elegant, with a honeyed palate,' CZ. 'Pale, soft and fruity on the nose, with a harmonious palate,' NC. 'Varietal typicity on the nose and off-dry on the palate. Smooth and fresh, with a gentle sweetness,' LB.

£13.22, Les Caves de Pyrène, 01483 538820

HOW IT WORKED

Only wines priced between roughly £7.50 and £30, and below 10g of residual sugar, were included. Wines were tasted blind, with tasters only aware of these restrictions and the fact that the wines were all Riesling. Individual prices and countries of origin were only revealed after the wines were tasted and scored. Each wine was given a score out of 20 and each taster's score was then collated to give an average rating for each wine out of 100.

Results are listed by country, in descending order of average score. Only wines scoring over 60% are included here.

All wines are available to the UK on-trade and all prices are ex-VAT trade prices (for different vintages in some cases), except where noted.

76 Neudorf Brightwater Riesling 2008, Nelson

'Rubber and citrus on the nose, with some back-end acidity,' NL. 'Very minerally and well rounded. Fruity and herbaceous, with crisp acidity,' JH. £8.98, Richards Walford, 01780 460451

73 Craggy Range Te Muna Road Riesling 2010, Martinborough

'Delicate floral perfume, nice balance on acidity, with delicate peaches and



a gorgeous finish,' RL. 'Clean and fresh, with white fruit on the nose. Crisp and refreshing,' AB. £10.78, Louis Latour, 020 7409 7276

72 Fromm Riesling 2009, Marlborough

'The whole package. Some ripeness of fruit but balanced by great acidity,' CC. 'Off-dry, with nice acidity. Slightly old-school overall,' PM. £9.97, Boutinot, 0161 908 1300

69 Waipara Springs Premo Dry Riesling 2009, Waipara

'Hints of botrytis, stone fruit and a

delicate note of honey,' RL. 'Some petrol on the nose. Hotter-climate Riesling – hazelnut, ripe apple and citrus,' IA. £8.36, Cambridge Wine Merchants, 01954 214528

AUSTRALIA

Average score: 72.9

75 Petaluma Hanlin Hill Riesling 2009, Clare Valley

'Very flowery on the nose, with exotic hints of Indian spices,' AB. 'Classic New World Riesling with a lean and youthful style,' PB. 'Soft texture, with a lovely

rubber band aroma on the nose,' NL. £8.52, Bibendum, 0845 263 6926

75 Grosset Hill Smith Mesh 2009, Eden Valley

'Tight and mineral but then long and lush in the glass. A great one to age,' RL. 'Lots of citrus on the nose followed by a tight and mineral palate,' AB. £13.23, Berkmann, 020 7609 4711

74 Pikes Riesling 2009, Clare Valley

'Attractive: a lovely buttery nose, with some floral hints too,' JH. 'Minerality and notes of rubber, both on the nose and palate,' CZ. 'Off-dry style, with very

good acidity and good length,' LB. £9.45, Lea and Sandeman, 020 7244 0522

73 Egon Muller Kanta Riesling 2008, Adelaide Hills

'Minerality, with a sherbet nose and some ripe apricot,' CZ. 'Well rounded, with balanced acidity. Slightly creamy – drinking well at the moment,' RL. £14.25, Top Selection, 020 7499 4440

68 Jim Barry Florita 2008, Watervale 'Minerality and fresh acidity on the palate, with good length,' LB. 'Lovely evolved



nose, and lingering on the palate. Good for light food such as dim sum, and with gorgeous acidity,' RJ. £18.23, Berkmann, 020 7609 4711



also improve with age,' PM. £20.56, Richards Walford, 01780 460451



with good dry length,' CZ. 'Lively subtle fruit, with some earthiness and flintiness, and low alcohol,' NC. 'Ripe red apple, with some nice acidity,' CC. £11.50, Wine Barn, 01256 391211



on the palate, with good acidity. Nutty, citrusy, orange peel and quince. Well balanced,' IA. 'Great balance, with some residual sugar but still bright and fresh, with some lemon and lime,' CC. £14.54, Astrum Wines, 020 3328 4620

66 Falkenstein Val Venosta Riesling 2008, Alto Adige
'Creamy notes on the nose. Clean and fresh on the palate, with good fruit,' JH. 'Very pronounced mineral nose, with hints of floral characters that carry on to the palate,' SK. £13.87, Les Caves de Pyrène, 01483 538820

Many thanks to Mark Deamer for his role in organising the tasting and to the Marylebone Hotel for hosting it.

CONCLUSIONS

● Wines were of a high standard, only one didn't make the 60% cut.

● Chile had the top average score, but with only two entries. New Zealand won a convincing second place with five wines – without approaching the higher prices of some of the other countries.

● While prices were certainly premium, there was plenty of value to be found.

● Food matching was more of a factor for this tasting than for most. Panellists recognised the great potential of this grape.

● There is seemingly a great discrepancy between the wine trade's perception of Riesling and that of consumers.

● A number of tasters commented on an appealing mushroom character in some of the best examples tasted.

PANEL COMMENTS

IRINA ATANASOVA, LES DEUX SALONS
'The wines I liked showed where they were from, with more floral styles coming from mountainous regions. In some, presumably the ones from hotter countries, the acidity was too low for Riesling in my opinion. I was thinking about flavour matches with fish, seafood or spicy food.'

PAULO BRAMMER, ETM GROUP
'There was massive versatility here. It was nice to see such huge variation and terroir expression. Pricing was quite diverse too. I was sad not to see £8 Riesling but on the other hand I tasted some £12 bottles that should have been £8. That said, there were a couple of bargains that would really sell themselves on a list.'

ANDREA BRICCARIELLO, GALVIN LA CHAPELLE
'My expectations were very high for this tasting and I wasn't entirely convinced. For Riesling, you need a balance of fruit, ripeness and minerality. Some had a bit more residual sugar, and those were the ones that shone more – I love a bit of residual sugar in a wine.'

LUIGI BUONANNO, ETRUSCA RESTAURANTS

'This was an interesting tasting. Including wines from everywhere around the world really gave the big picture of what Riesling is about. The citrus notes were the *leitmotif* of the tasting and the difference between New and Old World was really tangible. The Old World wines were more transparent and clear, with fine lemony notes, while the New World offered more round and smooth flavours.'

CLINTON CAWOOD, IMBIBE

'There were just a few distinct styles here – most wines fitted neatly into a category, either lean and elegant or more ripe and generous. There were few renegade wines that dared step outside of this. That said, the Riesling here proved that it's particularly faithful to where it's from and, aside from some exorbitant exceptions, the pricing was quite reasonable too.'

NICK CHIU, ASHDOWN PARK HOTEL

'I was expecting more diversity, modern vinification and more ambition. I was also looking for more of that German style of Riesling. As sommeliers, we try to find Rieslings that are maybe more diverse. There were a few here that I'd put on my list for their diversity. They had ripe, tropical, herbaceous characters, as well as that typical honey. And they were generally good value for money.'

JAMES HOPKINS, THE LONDON COCKTAIL CLUB

'This tasting was interesting and it was good to see so much complexity. Each country showed a particular style, even if that style wasn't typical or predictable. This really showed the diversity of Riesling. Some of these wines I could definitely sell but there were others that didn't quite deserve their price.'

ROGER JONES, THE HARROW AT LITTLE BEDWYN

'I was looking for wines that were refreshing, clean and crisp when young, and then I was looking for that brioche character with the older ones. Some of these wines still need 10 years. Riesling is so cheap – why can't you cellar it?'

SENTHIL KULANDHAISAMY, OXO TOWER RESTAURANT

'There was some great vintage variation here – you could see the ageing – and some really had development on the nose. I was looking more towards the drier examples. There were wines here that were well balanced and something you'd want on your list.'

NIGEL LISTER, ROYAL THAMES YACHT CLUB

'This tasting was reassuring – the standard here was good and generally consistent. You'd get the soft, fleshy, peachy wines and then the more mineral, zesty style. It was interesting to see how many people are doing the German style – that's my kind of Riesling. For Asian food, these wines really work. And the relatively low alcohol helps as higher levels of alcohol clashes with spice.'

ROBERTO LOPPI, HAKKASAN MAYFAIR

'I think consumers are aware of Riesling but they still think it's a sweet wine. It's important that we recommend Riesling to customers because we know it's versatile. It works well with food, although that depends on the kitchen. We've got a sharing format that suits versatile styles and slightly off-dry Riesling offers that.'

PETER MCCOMBIE MW

'This was a strong tasting. I don't think there were a lot of duds here. People in the wine business like Riesling – so I was well disposed towards them. There were plenty of wines here that I would consider buying. It's such a useful food wine, that I think if we made the effort to sell it, there would be opportunities. It has personality and backbone.'

GERGELY SZABO, LE BOUCHON BRETON

'There were some recognisable styles, use of residual sugar, or a degree of minerality, but I don't think that a German Shepherd could have separated Rheingau from Eden Valley here. There were some mushroomy examples, which is a new dimension and gives new matchability for Riesling. However, Riesling is a varietal that seems incapable of producing quality without spending money.'

CHRIS ZOELLER, SAVOY GRILL

'How sellable these wines are depends on the menu. I used to be based at an Asian-style restaurant and where the food is less usual, you can sell unusual wines. These would be a bit tougher to sell on a traditional menu. This said, people are increasingly beginning to understand Riesling.'

AUSTRIA

Average score: 72.8

81 Prager Riesling Achleiten Smaragd 2008, Burgenland
'Honeyed, flinty nose, with tropical fruit,' GS. 'Candied fruit nose, with some honey notes. Less acidity, relatively, but great richness,' CZ. 'Subtle earthy honey notes, as well as apricots. Good weight,' NC. £308 per case in bond for 2006 vintage, Fine & Rare Wines, 020 8960 1995

76 Emmerich Knoll Riesling Ried Kellerberg Smaragd 2009, Wachau
'Soft fruit on the nose. Mineral and earthy, with hints of lychees and good length,' NC. 'Honey and dry blossoms, with an off-dry palate. Velvety, with good acidity and length,' LB. £21.64, Richards Walford, 01780 460451

70 Domane Wachau Riesling 'Terrassen' Smaragd 2008, Wachau
'Peaches and berries – well balanced with ripe fruit,' AB. 'Green notes on the palate, like kiwi fruit, and good length too,' SK. £11.54, Alliance Wines, 01505 506060

69 Kurt Angerer Riesling Ametberg 2009, Kamptal
'Pale, soft earthy notes on the nose, followed by pleasant green apple flavours on the palate, and a clean fresh finish,' NC. 'A great food wine – mineral, with good freshness, and very juicy on the palate,' LB. £11.00, Noel Young, 01223 566744

68 FX Pichler Riesling Steinertal Smaragd 2008, Wachau
'White stonefruit, ripe melon and guava,' AB. 'Zesty grapefruit and lemon, with delightful freshness. Quite forward, with just enough sweetness to balance. Will

NEW YORK STATE, USA

Average score: 70.6

These wines are not currently available in the UK, but can be ordered from Hunter & Hillsberg in Germany, +49 (30) 84 70 84 84

76 Chateau Lafayette Reneau Dry Riesling 2009
'Very intense, with high concentration of fruit – ripe mandarin, for example. Off-dry and complex on the palate,' RL. 'Very perfumed, floral style, with ripe sweet fruit on the palate,' NL.

75 Herman J Wiemer Dry Riesling 2008
'Mineral, dry and clean, with white pepper, nettle and elderflower flavours,' CZ. 'Very fruity – peach and orange zest. Complex, with good weight, and minerality and alcohol balanced with acidity,' RL.

75 Anthony Road Wine Company Dry Riesling 2008
'Intense tropical ripe fruit on the nose, with honey, apricots and citrus, finishing with a zesty twist,' GS. 'Great honeyed nose, with a slight petrol character, and a bit of smokiness,' CC. 'Mellow, well-balanced mid-palate, with a lingering follow-through. Soft fruit, with an oily brioche note,' RJ.

68 Lamoreaux Landing Wine Cellars Dry Riesling 2009
'Tropical nose with pineapple notes and a good, juicy palate and good length,' LB. 'Full ripe, white peaches on the nose, followed by lovely acidity,' RJ.

67 Sheldrake Point Vineyards Dry Riesling 2009
'Very citrusy and vibrant, with lots of lime and fresh grapefruit acidity,' AB. 'Mineral and citrus acidity – very classy but tight as well,' PM.

63 Keuka Lake Vineyards Falling Man Vineyard Dry Riesling 2009
'Peach punch nose, and perfumed, with ripe and lush sherbet fruits on the palate,' RJ. 'Quite tight acidity – fresh and light on its feet but may well fill out with bottle age,' PM.

GERMANY

Average score: 70

76 Wittmann Aulerde Trocken Grosses Gewächs 2009, Rheinhessen
'Floral, eucalyptus and tropical notes. A bit fizzy but good complexity, nice structure and not too flashy,' GS. 'Earthy and mineral, with ripe peach and red berries on the palate. A mineral, almost salty finish,' AB. £21.15, The WineBarn, 01256 391211

69 Reichsrat Von Buhl QbA Trocken 2009, Pfalz
'Charming nose, with ripe stone fruit and a touch of chamomile. The palate is more linear,' PB. 'Hints of honey and signs of some ageing. Honey also on the palate, with good balance,' SK. £8.43, Great Western Wines, 01225 322 820

69 Hermann Donnhoff QbA Trocken 2009, Nahe
'Moderate acidity, with quince and green apple flavours,' IA. 'Green apple notes, along with a grassiness. Vibrant and citrus character,' AB. £10.07, Les Caves de Pyrène, 01483 538820

69 Georg Breuer Nonnenberg Trocken 2007, Rheingau
'Lovely exuberant fruit, with good balance and length,' NL. 'Developed nose, with floral and honeyed notes, and slight development on the palate too. Good balance,' SK. £24.59, Noel Young, 01223 566744

66 Forster Ungeheuer Kabinett Trocken 2009, Pfalz
'Light honey and apricot on the nose,

ALSACE, FRANCE

Average score: 68.5

74 Hugel Riesling 'Tradition' 2006
'Herbaceous honey nose with hints of pineapple. Good weight – a deep, grapey, substantial wine. A great food wine,' NC. 'Mushroom notes – a very good, smooth palate. Velvety, with a fresh finish,' LB. £11.50, J E Fells, 01442 870900

72 René Muré Riesling 'Signature' 2006
'Lipstick and perfume on the nose, with orange peel aromas,' JH. 'Candied and mushroom notes, with richer caramel and saltiness on the palate,' CZ. £8.76, Berkmann, 020 7609 4711

72 Trimbach Cuvée Frédéric Emile 2004
'A bit shy on the nose but good citrus notes and minerality on the palate,' RL. 'Ripe fruit, great length, well balanced and well aged,' IA. £27.68, Enotria, 020 8961 4411

69 Albert Mann Riesling Tradition 2009
'Floral nose, with good fruit concentration – citrus and apricots,' GS. 'Tight nose with floral notes and ripe tropical fruit,' AB. £10.22, Les Caves de Pyrène, 01483 538820

Also tasted: Gresser Riesling Kastelberg Grand Cru 2004, Alsace.

ITALY

Average score: 68.3

71 Herzu Germano Ettore Langhe Riesling 2008, Piemonte
'Delicate and citrusy with a very youthful nose. Concentrated fruit and a pleasant fruity finish,' PB. 'Predominant petrol